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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 002618

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SUBJECT: JOWHAR FALLS

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns L. Peterson, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (U) Action request - para 9.

12. (C) SUMMARY: The town of Jowhar came under Islamic Court Union (ICU) control the afternoon of June 14. The UN received direct assistance from known extremist Aden Hashi Ayrow to protect the UN compound in Jowhar, an incident that makes it appear that Ayrow is an important player to be reckoned with. The town of Baidoa (seat of the Transitional Federal Institutions - TFIs) continues to experience instability, but this may not be connected to the actions of the ICU elsewhere in the country. The UN has reports that an Ethiopian brigade positioned along the Somali border has been reinforced with armor and helicopters, sparking fears about an Ethiopian incursion to Somalia. Such a move could lead to greatly expanded conflict and could ultimately cause the TFIs to fail. In this light, we advise a high-level call to Ethiopia to dissuade movement of troops into Somalia. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) As of approximately 1300 local time, the town of Jowhar, north-east of Mogadishu, has come under the control of Islamic court militia. Warlords Mohamed Qanyare Affrah and Issa Botan Alin fled Jowhar for the town of El Bur prior to the takeover. Jowhar warlord Mohamed Dheere remains in Addis Ababa.

14. (C) The UN has received regular updates on events on the ground in Jowhar from their Somali staff, who have been sheltering in the UNICEF compound there. The UN obtained assurances of security for the compound from Sheikh Inda'adde, but these assurances were not respected by the commander on the ground. Subsequent contacts put the UN in direct contact with Aden Hashi Ayrow, who went himself to the compound, removed the militia, and placed a technical on site to protect the compound.

15. (C) The UN has reports of a brigade positioned on the border between the Shebelle and Jubba rivers. These reports indicate that the brigade was reinforced with a squadron of armor and MI-24 Hind B helicopters. (The UN's Joe Gordon notes that this reinforcement re-creates the initial stages of a 1996 Ethiopian incursion to Somalia.)

16. (C) The town of Baidoa (the seat of the TFIs) continues to experience instability, but it is unclear whether this is connected to the Islamic courts or is a continuation of ongoing inter-militia problems there. The town was on alert the evening of June 13 because 25 technicals from the courts were advancing toward Baidoa. However, it appears the technicals were advancing to the town of Bur Acaba in search of Qanyare and Botan (who, as noted above, seem to have gone in quite a different direction).

¶17. (C) Unlike Mogadishu, Jowhar has no existing court for the ICU to tap into. They will likely attempt to establish a new court, but it is unclear at this time with what individuals and clan they will seek to ally themselves. The fall of Jowhar is a major blow to the Transitional Federal Government because the ICU has proven that it can not only block the TFIs' entry to Mogadishu, but can take over a temporary seat of government and potentially expand its reach elsewhere in Somalia.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: Ayrow has kept a low profile in the ICU's public statements, which may be a calculated move to present a face of moderation to the outside world. His direct involvement in protecting a UN entity is likely an equally calculated move to make Ayrow specifically more palatable to the international community. While all have been watching for signs that the moderates among the courts may have influence within the ICU, this one action highlights Ayrow's military strength. Most Somalia observers will not be fooled, but we must be on guard for those who are willing to argue that this is now a kinder, gentler Ayrow. END COMMENT.

¶19. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Ethiopia's reported actions are unhelpful, as they raise the potential for expanded combat in Somalia and potentially the complete dissolution of the TFIs. Dheere's mysterious extended sojourn in Ethiopia, particularly as his town was being set upon, raises concerns within the international community about what sort of plans have been hatched. Many in Somalia will also believe that Ethiopia's actions have been directed by the U.S. (a myth firmly believed by a segment of the Somali population.) We advise high-level communication with Ethiopia to urge that

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forces not cross the border. END ACTION REQUEST.  
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